

Joint Communiqué of the United States-Oman Subcommittee on Environmental Affairs and Joint Forum on Environmental Cooperation

Muscat, Oman – On February 19, 2024, the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the United States of America (Governments) held the inaugural meeting of the Subcommittee on Environmental Affairs (Subcommittee) established under the United States-Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the fourth meeting of the Joint Forum on Environmental Cooperation established under the United States-Oman Memorandum of Understanding on Environmental Cooperation (MOU). The MOU was negotiated in parallel with the FTA and recognizes the importance of strengthening capacity to protect the environment while promoting sustainable economic development, in concert with the expanded bilateral trade relationship as a result of the FTA.

The meetings serve as an important opportunity to continue and enhance the longstanding bilateral relationship between the United States and Oman, and to highlight a shared commitment to environmental protection and the sustainable use of natural resources.

The Oman delegation included representatives from the Environment Authority; Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources. The United States delegation included representatives from the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, U.S. Department of State, U.S. Embassy Muscat, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service.

The Subcommittee reviewed the Parties' progress in implementing obligations under the Environment Chapter (Chapter 17) of the FTA by exchanging information regarding recent actions each Party has taken to: (1) establish high levels of environmental protection; (2) effectively enforce environmental laws and regulations; and (3) provide opportunities for public participation with respect to the implementation of the Environment Chapter.

In this regard, the Governments exchanged information and views regarding respective and global efforts to: tackle the climate crisis; strengthen marine species conservation, including through combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and implementing the WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement; promote circular economy approaches, including with respect to waste management and plastic pollution; and combat wildlife trafficking and support the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The Joint Forum reviewed the implementation of the MOU and discussed environmental cooperation projects completed under the 2018-2021 Plan of Action on Environmental Cooperation, including activities on protected area management, sea turtle conservation, implementation of CITES, combating wildlife trafficking, and disaster management and emergency preparedness.

The Joint Forum also approved the 2024-2027 Plan of Action, which includes the following priorities for environmental cooperation: protecting wildlife and combating wildlife trafficking; tackling the climate crisis; combating plastic and air pollution; strengthening environmental laws and enforcement; improving disaster management response; and advancing inclusiveness in the development, implementation, and enforcement of the Governments' respective domestic environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

The Subcommittee and Joint Forum held a joint public session on February 20, consistent with relevant requirements in Chapter 17 of the FTA. The public session included civil society and private sector representatives. The Governments updated the public about their respective efforts to implement Chapter 17 and to strengthen environmental cooperation under the MOU. Public participants had the opportunity to engage directly with government officials by offering comments and asking questions about implementation of the FTA Chapter 17 and the MOU.